

Cherish the fabric of community

BY BRENDA REIMER

ON MAY 11, the Moose Hall was transformed with the glitter of twinkling lights and the rich colours of fabrics and jewelry from many countries.

On a cool spring Thunder Bay evening, stepping into the Tapestry Women's Network Gala Celebration was like stepping into another world. The hall was filled with music and excited chatter. Guests 'oohed!' and 'aahed!' over beautiful saris and other traditional dresses worn by the women. Men were resplendent in jackets and vests from their home countries.

The Tapestry Women's Network was formed to give both newcomers and longtime residents an opportunity to meet together to learn about each other's cultures and to work on projects which benefit the whole community. This Gala evening was a celebration of this coming together of cultures.

Each dish on the menu originated in a different country and was prepared by someone from that community: Middle Eastern Fattoush salad; African bananas and tomato sauce; Indian chicken biryani; Chinese noodles and for the sweet tooth Baklava. A true feast on the non-vegetarian table. I can't speak to the vegetarian delights.

Before the meal elder Cindy Crowe spoke of the Blue Sky Community Healing Centre and the importance of the circle in Indigenous culture. As the cooks who had prepared the food were



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presented, I felt part of a circle — a much wider circle than usual. This feeling only increased as participants modelled wedding dresses and bridal finery from their culture along with some information about wedding ceremonies and customs.

The presentations were interspersed with traditional dances in costume performed by women from the World Cultural Dance group.

We were on a journey far from Thunder Bay and it was dazzling.

The journey came a little closer to home when the glittery jewels, brilliant colours and gauzy fabrics were replaced by moose hide and intricate bead work for the Anishnaabe bride and groom. When the groom tied a moose hide thong around his and the bride's wrists, joining them together as one, I was reminded again both of the importance of the circle and also of other cultures where this binding togeth-

er is part of the marriage ritual.

Thunder Bay-Superior North MP Patty Hajdu perhaps summed up this remarkable evening best when she referred to it as a way of building the fabric of our community. Every time newcomers and longtime residents have opportunities to learn from each other and to celebrate both their similarities and differences, the fabric of our community is strengthened. We may not be able to change the course of events in our uncertain world, but we can continue to strengthen the fabric of our community here in Thunder Bay.

If this has piqued your interest, the month of June offers more opportunities to strengthen the fabric.

It's Pride Month and there are many activities, including a Parade and Celebration in Waverley Park on June 15 — this Saturday.

National Indigenous People's Day is June 21 and we are all invited to Marina Park to participate in the powwow.

More cultural foods, (eat in or take out) will be featured at the Tapestry Women's Network picnic at the Moose Hall on June 23.

You can expand your circle by participating in these events. You'll be helping to build a stronger community while having fun.

Brenda Reimer is a long-time resident of Thunder Bay and an active member of Diversity Thunder Bay. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.